



## Moving west: German-speaking immigration to British Columbia, 1945-1961

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### Abstract:

Germans are among the largest ethnic groups, both in Canada as a whole and in British Columbia. Nevertheless, neither nationally, nor provincially, has this group received much academic attention, especially for the years between the end of the Second World War and the building of the Berlin Wall when about 200,000 German-speaking persons arrived in Canada. Based on the life stories of fifty German immigrants interviewed in British Columbia, published biographies, and archival records from Germany and Canada, this study reconstructs the conditions in interwar and postwar Europe that led to the mass-emigration of Germans in the late 1940s and the 1950s. It argues that this migration movement was not only influenced by government policies and the support of humanitarian organizations, but also by the existence of earlier settlement facilitating chain migrations to Canada. From the port of entry, the dissertation follows the immigrants' adaptation and integration into Canadian society. Though the vast majority of them did not speak any English, or know much about their adopted country, except that it must be better than what they left in war-torn Europe, Germans are generally ranked among the best integrated ethnic groups in Canada. Yet, despite this assessment, the picture emerging from the sources strongly questions the existence of a singular German immigrant identity in Canada. The distinct self-perceptions of German nationals and ethnic Germans based on their experiences in Europe during the Second World War created striking differences in their patterns of immigration and adaptation to life in Canada which are still discernible after over half a century of settlement in North America.

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